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SUBJ: AMBASSADOR PAYS FAREWELL CALL ON PRIME MINISTER HELEN CLARK

Classified by AMBASSADOR William McCormick, reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Ambassador called on Prime Minister Helen Clark November 13 to say farewell as he prepares to conclude his assignment as Ambassador and as the Prime Minister prepares to step down sometime in the next few days. The Ambassador thanked the Prime Minister for everything she has done to improve the bilateral relationship, noting that the two governments together had changed the relationship in what had sometimes been a difficult environment by focusing on common concerns. The Prime Minister agreed, saying that we had made considerable progress together. She thanked the Ambassador for all he had done and asked the Ambassador to convey her thanks to the President for his friendship. She praised the Secretary, Assistant Secretary Hill, DAS Davies and former ANP Director McGann for their contributions.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador said that he would remain interested in the Pacific after he left his post. He said that the Pacific Island Countries face enormous governance challenges and New Zealand is "carrying the load" in working with those countries. The Prime Minister observed that she was particularly concerned about Fiji. The United States is now paying more attention to the Pacific than at any time since World War II and that needs to continue. Both agreed that they shared a serious concern about the growth of dollar diplomacy in the region, particularly by the Chinese who often step in when New Zealand and others try to persuade PIC governments to take necessary but unpalatable steps. The Ambassador said that he had been disappointed at the praise Samoa recently lavished on Chinese construction projects, including a lavish but impractical swimming pool complex, while giving much less attention to the forty years of Peace Corps contributions to the islands economy and society.

¶3. (C) PM Clark said she had recently been very disappointed that the Tongan candidate, Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Viliam Ta'u tangi, to be elected Regional Director of the World Health Organization Western Pacific regional Office had been defeated. New Zealand had agreed to support the decision of the Pacific Island Forum to vote in favor of the Tongan candidate only to discover that many PIF representatives, including the PIF chairman, eventually voted against the Tongan candidate. It was clear to her, the PM said, that money had likely played a role in changing their votes to favor the successful Korean candidate.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador expressed his hope that Clark would stay involved in international issues. She responded that she was looking for opportunities but recognized that the prime minister of a small country might not always be in great demand. The Ambassador responded that Kiwis always told him they were a small country, but he never heard this from Washington because the U.S. saw them as a significant partner. Clark said that she hoped New Zealand was seen as a friendly Western country that sometimes can do things the United States cannot.

McCormick